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First regular session of 1994

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 15 February 1994, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. ANSARI (India)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD (continued)

1. Mr. BANGALI (Sierra Leone) said that his delegation strongly favoured alternating the Executive Board's annual sessions between Geneva and New York, as had been decided by the Governing Council in 1993. His delegation believed that, in the interest of effective participation, it would be better not to scatter sessions throughout the year. Particular attention should be given to timing, in order to allow for representation from capitals. Given its reduced membership, the Executive Board should adopt an open-door policy and encourage the active participation of non-governmental organizations.

2. Ms. VOLKOFF (Canada) said her delegation was in favour of a two-week annual session, but believed that two days would not suffice to cover the many topics proposed for the spring session. She hoped that in the future, given that the Executive Board served both the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), that UNFPA topics would be included in the regular sessions. While she understood the view of the representative of New Zealand that future Executive Board sessions should take place in New York, she agreed with other representatives that the Geneva option should be retained for the current year.

3. Mr. NIE Hua Liang (China) said that his delegation endorsed the proposed distribution of topics between annual and regular sessions. With regard to the duration of meetings, General Assembly resolution 48/162 stipulated that important questions of policy were to be discussed in the Economic and Social Council, and therefore, the Board's annual session should be shorter than the Governing Council's had been. His delegation had no preference with regard to the venue of sessions, as long as it was conducive to the full participation of all members. His delegation agreed that two regular sessions should be held yearly, one in the spring and one in the autumn, and that three sessions per year would be sufficient. To have too many meetings would pose organizational difficulties. Moreover, his delegation was of the view that the Executive Board would have greater opportunity for dialogue with the secretariat and that it should avoid micro-management. It should also be more transparent and encourage the participation of observers.

4. Mr. HORIGUCHI (Japan) said that the Executive Board was in a transitional year and should be as pragmatic as possible when adopting decisions. His delegation was flexible with regard to the frequency, timing and duration of regular and annual sessions. According to the schedule proposed by the Secretariat, a total of 21 working days had been allotted to the Executive Board, or seven days more than the previous year's Governing Council. He wished to learn from the secretariat whether services could be available for those additional days. Finally, with regard to the venue of sessions, his delegation supported the position of the representative of New Zealand.

5. Mr. STELZER (Observer for Austria) said that the decision adopted by the Governing Council regarding the venue of the 1994 annual session remained valid and required no review. It was too soon to make a final decision regarding the duration of the annual session, but if the proposed division of labour was

(Mr. Stelzer, Observer, Austria)

adopted, then a two-week period was reasonable. Observers' opinions should be taken into consideration when the Executive Board decided which topics were of wide interest, particularly when those issues affected observers' interests. His delegation also supported the suggestion that the Office for Project Services (OPS), a topic of wide interest, should be discussed before the annual session within the framework of an informal mechanism, which should be set up as soon as possible and should be open to members of the Executive Board and observers.

6. Mr. ELIASHIV (Observer for Israel) agreed that observers should be given the opportunity to participate in meetings and receive all the documentation which was available to members. In general, his delegation supported the proposed division of labour and a two-week session in June.

7. Mr. ROHNER (Observer for Switzerland) said it was vital that UNDP organizational arrangements should be openly discussed and that all participating countries, including temporary observers, should be given a say in the debate. Annual meetings should be open to all members, observers and specialized agencies, and the topics discussed should be of interest to all participants, including those from the capitals. The Executive Board should set dates for regular sessions at the beginning of the year, rather than later, and in general, in the interest of transparency, it should work as little as possible on an ad hoc basis. It would be better to divide the workload among the specialists available to the Executive Board, and perhaps eventually revert to the use of subcommittees to deal with programming and financial matters. He endorsed the proposal that the annual sessions should be held in Europe in alternate years, as it was in the interest of UNDP to maintain contact with the agencies and capitals located there. More time should be devoted to UNFPA than in the past and, if possible, UNFPA country programmes should be considered together with UNDP country programmes.

8. Mr. HALDEA (India) said that his delegation favoured the two-week annual session and supported holding the 1994 annual session in Geneva. In general, sessions should be limited to three per year. His delegation strongly favoured maximizing observers' participation which it considered to be of great benefit to the Executive Board.

9. Mrs. AMERASEKARE (Observer for Sri Lanka) strongly supported the view that the participation of observer States in Executive Board meetings must be encouraged. While her delegation was flexible regarding the venue of the 1994 annual session, it was in favour of holding Executive Board sessions at UNDP headquarters in future years. The rules of procedure should be changed only if necessary; no amendment or interpretation of the rules of procedure, and no venue for meetings, should be such as to prevent observer States from participating in the annual or regular sessions if they so desired. Concerning the division of labour between annual and regular sessions, broad policy issues should be discussed at the annual session and other matters, including matters on which UNDP required immediate guidance, at the regular sessions. The working methods and division of labour should ultimately result in efficiency, transparency and accountability. That aim could be achieved by improving the quality and frequency of the flow of information regarding programmes, budgetary matters and administrative matters between UNDP and the Executive Board. An

(Mrs. Amerasekare, Observer,
Sri Lanka)

advance agenda and a summary of decisions taken by the Executive Board would be considerably useful to member States in deciding whether to participate or not in such meetings.

10. For reasons of transparency and democracy, her delegation was opposed to ad hoc negotiating mechanisms. The number of regular sessions and the duration of annual sessions should be based on the workload before the Board.

11. Mr. BELLA (Slovakia) said that he was in favour of shorter and more frequent meetings and supported the holding of annual sessions alternately at United Nations Headquarters and the Geneva office. His delegation also advocated the participation of observers in Executive Board sessions, and would be in favour of a spring regular session in March 1994.

12. Mr. RAI (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation had no problem with the secretariat's proposed dates for the 1994 sessions. Concerning the venue of the annual session, he agreed with the delegations of New Zealand and Japan that meeting at Geneva would present practical problems for many countries which had no missions there and were substantial recipients of UNDP development assistance. However, his delegation would join any consensus that emerged. It was in favour of a two-week annual session and shorter, more frequent regular sessions as necessary, including when the General Assembly was in session, and would like to see a flexible arrangement that would allow maximum observer participation in discussing matters of interest to member States. Where the Board's rules of procedure were concerned, those of the Governing Council should be used as the basis and adapted to changing circumstances.

13. Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) said that his delegation favoured a two-week annual session with more frequent and shorter regular sessions. However, he was in principle against ad hoc mechanisms. Although his delegation would have no difficulties attending annual sessions at Geneva, it would prefer them to be held in New York. More concise but complete documentation would be appreciated. Those aspects of the rules of procedure of the Governing Council that were still relevant should be retained, and the United Nations Legal Counsel and UNDP should examine those rules in order to identify what was still valid in the light of General Assembly resolution 48/162. Should the Executive Board as whole be unable to draft new rules of procedure, that task could be entrusted to an ad hoc working group. As the Executive Board was in a process of transition, it was not important to come up with permanent rules of procedure right away. The eventual recommendations of the ad hoc working group could be used provisionally and adapted according to needs for a period of one to two years.

14. Mr. MAJID (Bangladesh) said that Executive Board sessions should take place in New York, so as to encourage maximum participation. Every opportunity should be given to observers to participate in meetings of the Board. The holding of Board meetings during the General Assembly could pose difficulties for some of the small delegations.

15. Mr. DIECKERT (Germany) said that as the current year was a transitional one for the Board, it should be flexible with respect to the admission of observers. In the medium term, the Board could fashion a more realistic admission procedure for observers in accordance with resolution 48/162 in order to facilitate smoother and more rapid decision-making. The Board itself should deal with substantive issues: there was no guarantee that the establishment of new committees would enhance the continuity of its work. In the case of very complex and sensitive issues, the Board might consider appointing a rapporteur to investigate the issues and prepare a basis for a decision. There was no need to prepare completely new rules of procedure from the outset, as the old rules were still applicable and could be amended in the light of developments in the work of the Board.

16. Mr. SIDDIG (Sudan) agreed with the representative of New Zealand and many other delegations that there were difficulties involved in holding sessions at Geneva. While his delegation could agree to the holding of the 1994 annual session there, it hoped that in future, such sessions could be held in New York. The Executive Board in its new shape was capable of facing the challenges before it, but in order for it to be effective, members needed to have the documents well before the sessions. His delegation had no objection in principle to having two-week annual sessions, and would like the regular sessions to be spread throughout the year.

17. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board), responding to the comment of the representative of Austria with respect to OPS, said that the issue had been proposed for consideration at the annual session in view of its importance to all delegations. However, since the regular sessions of the Board had the same power to take decisions, discussion of the issue could be advanced to an earlier meeting than June. Regarding the comment made by the representative of Japan that the Governing Council had met for 14 days in 1993, as opposed to the total of 21 days proposed for the Executive Board in 1994, he noted that the annual session in June 1993 had lasted 14 days, while the special session of the Council in February had brought the total to 18 working days. If it was planned to have the Board meeting as a whole to discuss most items, slightly more days would be required in 1994 than in 1993.

18. A large number of delegations seemed to prefer a brief meeting of the Board in March prior to the global meeting of resident representatives, in order to benefit from their presence in New York. If the country programmes along with mid-term reviews could be dealt with in March in one and a half to two days, then it would be feasible to hold such a meeting. In that case, the May session might need only two days instead of four full days.

19. There appeared to be some degree of support for a two-week annual session in June; three or four days could be allocated to UNFPA, a day or half a day to the Department for Development Support and Management Services (DDSMS) and perhaps a day to OPS, leaving a full week for UNDP. There appeared to be some preference for the last days of September for an additional regular session of the Board. While such an option would require last-minute approval by the General Assembly, he hoped it would be feasible. There did not appear to be any degree of unanimity on a meeting between September and January, while a number of delegations had expressed preference for a maximum of three meetings a year including the annual session. He therefore wondered whether delegations would

(Mr. Graisse)

insist on having an additional session at a time when the Second Committee would be in full swing and many delegations would be very busy dealing with other issues.

20. According to paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 48/162, the regular meetings of the Boards should be held at the premises of the headquarters of the respective organization as of the date when such premises were rendered possible to accommodate such meetings. The Executive Boards of the funds and programmes were encouraged to make the necessary facilities available as soon as possible without prejudice to the resources of existing programmes and projects. UNDP had been reviewing ways to accommodate the new 36-member Executive Board within its current headquarters premises. In New York, UNDP and UNFPA were dispersed over five buildings. The Sub-Group on Common Premises and Services had tentatively identified a building in the vicinity of the United Nations Secretariat building as a potential site for the consolidated premises of UNDP and UNFPA and for an overflow from UNICEF. In the event of a decision to retain UNDP in New York, all of UNDP and its associated funds, UNFPA and part of UNICEF could relocate to that building within two years.

21. The allocation of 50 per cent of a floor in the DC1 building to instal a meeting room for the Executive Board would provide adequate space for Board members and one additional person per delegation, observers and so on. However, the room in the DC1 building, which would accommodate between 80 and 100 persons, had some limitations. The view within the room would be obstructed by pillars and, because of the ceiling height, smaller than standard interpretation booths would have to be installed. Alternatively, consideration could be given to the technical and economic feasibility of providing simultaneous interpretation through closed-circuit television monitors installed in the meeting room and connected to interpretation facilities in the Secretariat building.

22. The estimated cost of installing the meeting room was approximately $800,000. An additional annual amount of $300,000 would be required to rent space for displaced organizational units. The Fifth Committee had reviewed the matter and had agreed that the question should be examined by the Secretary-General and the executive heads of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, and that the Secretary-General should report thereon to the General Assembly. If the members of the Board agreed, the Executive Board would prepare, in conjunction with the Secretariat, a full survey and full cost estimates relating to a meeting room for the Board in the DC1 building. The survey would be reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), the General Assembly and the Executive Board.

23. The Executive Board might consider requesting the UNICEF secretariat to make available a meeting room in UNICEF House for meetings of the Executive Board of UNDP and UNFPA. That could serve as a tentative solution pending the move to a new building in 1996.

24. Mr. AMAZIANE (Morocco) said that the Board should ensure that observers were able to attend all Board meetings.

25. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board) said that the room in the DC1 building would provide adequate space for Board members and observers. The room would accommodate approximately 80 to 100 persons.

26. Mr. HORIGUCHI (Japan) asked what expenditure was covered under the additional annual amount of $300,000.

27. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board) said that the $300,000 represented the annual cost of renting commercial space in another building, in the vicinity of the Secretariat building, in order to relocate the staff currently occupying about half a floor in the DC1 building.

28. Mrs. RIBEIRO-VANDERANWERA (Belgium) inquired whether the Board had decided to hold a two-day session in March and a two-day session in May. Such scheduling could pose difficulties for a number of delegations.

29. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board) said that it was up to the members of the Board to decide when to meet. He had merely wished to indicate that the necessary facilities and conference services would be available for meetings in March and May.

30. Mr. DIECKERT (Germany) said that the Board would take a decision on the headquarters location of UNDP and UNFPA at its annual session in June. He wished to point out that another location would probably not create additional costs for adequate meeting facilities. The Board should request the Administrator of UNDP to prepare, together with UNFPA, a report on the facilities and benefits and the cost of providing adequate meeting facilities in New York in order to enable the members of the Board to make a more informed decision.

31. Mr. EIDHAMMER (Norway) said that the Board should request the Secretariat to prepare a revised version of the proposals that had been made in order to enable the members of the Board to comment at the next meeting.

32. Mr. TAZADRID SUAREZ (Cuba) said that the Executive Board should provide a clear indication of the costs of holding sessions in New York, Geneva or elsewhere.

33. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board) said that the cost of holding meetings of the Governing Council at Geneva instead of in New York had been discussed in previous years. It might therefore be expedient to circulate the document that had been made available to the Governing Council at its last session.

34. Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) said that it would be difficult for observer delegations to attend meetings of the Executive Board at venues other than New York. Therefore, apart from the financial costs, the Board should consider the qualitative costs, and its decision should be based on both.

35. Mr. PEDERSEN (Denmark) said that, if the Board held its meetings at UNDP headquarters, it would be necessary to rent premises outside the UNDP building, at an annual cost of $300,000. It would therefore be more economical if UNICEF House was able to accommodate the 20 annual meetings of the Executive Board.

36. Mr. KING (Trinidad and Tobago) said that his delegation would have difficulty attending a two-day session in March and would have preferred that the Board held a four-day session in May. While his delegation remained flexible with respect to the September session, it would be reluctant to attend meetings scheduled after the Second Committee had begun its work.

37. Mr. BABA (Observer for Uganda) said that, in taking decisions regarding meeting arrangements, the Board must take into account the interests of observer delegations. While the Secretary of the Executive Board had indicated that the room in the DC1 building could accommodate between 80 and 100 participants, including observers, past experience had shown that certain agenda items tended to attract more than 100 participants.

38. The PRESIDENT said that he would consult delegations regarding the timing of the spring sessions and would report to the Board as soon as possible.

39. Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) said that the President should consult with delegations with a view to reaching agreement on the venue of the Board's summer session.

40. Mr. VAN ARENDONK (Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund) said that, at its annual session, the Board could discuss policy papers, while at its regular session it could discuss other documents not directly related to policy, as well as country programmes. UNDP and UNFPA country programmes relating to the same country should be discussed at the same time. At its annual session, the Board could consider the work plan and the review and assessment studies, while the annual financial review and audit report could be dealt with in September. In May, the Board could take up the periodic report and the report on contraceptive requirements. The various country programmes could be considered at all of those sessions.

41. The PRESIDENT invited the members of the Executive Board to consider the question of amending the rules of procedure of the Governing Council in order to bring them into line with General Assembly resolution 48/162.

42. Mr. AMAZIANE, supported by Mr. KING (Trinidad and Tobago), Mr. MACHIN (United Kingdom) and Mr. FERNANDEZ-PITA (Observer for Spain), proposed that the Executive Board should request the Secretariat, through the Office of the Legal Counsel, to prepare a paper containing proposals on the articles of the rules of procedures of the Governing Council that needed to be amended. There was no need for the Board to consider the rules of procedure article by article, since most of the rules did not require amendment.

43. Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) suggested that a special working group, or a working group of the whole, which would be chaired by the President, should prepare a paper on the rules of procedure that required amendment.

44. Mr. EIDHAMMER (Norway) supported the proposal to establish a working group. At the same time, the Board should have an opportunity to discuss the rules of procedure in more general terms in order to provide some guidance to the group.

45. The PRESIDENT said that it was his understanding that the Executive Board wished to seek the guidance of the Legal Counsel concerning the rules that needed to be amended in the light of General Assembly resolution 48/162. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the members of the Board agreed to establish a working group of the whole to consider the matter.

46. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.